

PRESIDENT WILSON'S WAR MIND

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To understand the war mind of President Wilson, and to learn the lesson it conveys, we must read his speeches from the beginning of the war as though they formed a continuous whole. Those who have not the full text of the speeches before them will find a good substitute in *The Foreign Policy of Woodrow Wilson*, by Messrs. Robinson and West (Macmillan), in which the relevant passages are presented in historical order. Reading them continuously, they present us with a natural, inevitable, and yet very remarkable evolution. I find nothing inconsistent between the earlier and the later sayings of the President, notwithstanding that the former are devoted to the advocacy of peace and the latter to the advocacy of war. On the contrary, the later passages throw back a meaning on to the earlier, which make them doubly significant, while the earlier are like the clear hours of the morning in which the weatherwise may read the portent of a coming storm.

It has been said that whosoever writes the history of the war must write it as a drama; and certainly there has been no more dramatic feature in the whole tragic story than that presented by the movement of Mr. Wilson's mind from position to position in correspondence with the gradual unfolding of the plot. In reading through these speeches one has the feeling familiar to every lover of the *Odyssey*. There is the same gradual darkening of the atmosphere as events march on to the final catastrophe, the same tightening of expectancy and tension as the gathering storm comes nearer, until at last, when the gloom is deepest, the lightning leaps out and retribution falls on the wrongdoer. If the words are not inadequate to matter of such moment, one may say of the speeches that they have the wholeness of a work of art. The germinating idea of Mr. Wilson's policy is that America, because of her greatness, of her power, of her vast potentialities, is a **servant** among the nations, and not a **master**. It is a noble conception, and peculiarly fitted to inspire a young and mighty people with a vision of its destiny, and so to mark out for it in the centuries that are to come a line of development different from and I think higher than, any which the older states of the world have so far pursued. Though the idea of greatness in service has been long familiar in other connections, where perhaps it has received more lip service than loyalty, President Wilson is the first statesman to make it operative, or to endeavor to make it operative, as a guiding principle of international politics; and this alone, whether he succeeds or

not, assures him a distinct place in history and in the grateful remembrance of mankind. Needless to say, this idea—that the greatest nation must needs be a servant nation—stands out as the polar opposite to the notion of national greatness which prevails with the rulers and apparently with the people of Germany; and a prescient mind, on hearing it first announced by Mr. Wilson in the early stages of the war, might have predicted that a moment would come when the two opposites, driven by a dramatic or moral necessity, would break out into open conflict with one another.

From the very first, the question uppermost in the President's mind has been this: In what way, by what policy, by what action can America best serve the nations involved in the struggle, and through them mankind at large? Again and again his public utterances have repeated this, thereby showing its solemn insistence in his private mind: and though he has varied his answer with the change of circumstance, he has never departed from the purpose and spirit of the question. Indeed, he did not wait for the war to disclose his guiding idea.

On March 5, 1914, he said, in a message to Congress when the Panama tolls were under discussion: 'We are too big, too powerful, too self-respecting a nation to interpret with too strained or refined a reading the words of our own promises just because we have power enough to give us leave to read them as we please'—a sentence which, in its latter clause, anticipates the most hateful aspect of German policy both in the initiation and the conduct of the war, and is almost a prediction of the coming conflict. Again, on April 30, 1915, he said to the members of the Associated Press: 'We do not want anything that does not belong to us. Is not a nation in that position free to serve other nations?' And three days after the Lusitania had been sunk he followed with the statement, so much misunderstood at the time: 'I am interested in neutrality because there is something so much greater to do than to fight. There is a distinction waiting for this nation which no nation has ever yet had.' A year later he sounded the same note. On April 19, 1916, he said: 'We cannot forget that we are the responsible spokesmen of the rights of humanity.' What this last involved comes out very clearly in the Address to Congress on the occasion of America's entry into the war. 'We shall fight for the things we have always carried nearest our hearts—for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own government, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations, and make the world itself free.'

If the reader will take these speeches as a connected whole, or even the few sentences I have quoted, he will have before him the Odyssey of the President's mind. They indicate the successive stages through which he passed in his efforts to find an answer to the question: How can the United States, in the world crisis that has now arisen, most effectually serve mankind? In the earlier stages 'neutrality' covered

the answer that then seemed most fitting. By remaining neutral the President believed that the United States could render most help not only in hastening the advent of peace, but in giving to peace, whenever it should come, the form most conducive to the just interests of all concerned. He believed—and rightly believed—that impartiality would confer upon America rights and powers as a peacemaker both during the conflict and afterwards; and he saw, further, that a peace-making nation was the world's greatest need at the time. Then, through no will of his own, but by the direct action of Germany, the right to be neutral, the power to be impartial, was taken from him. The consequence was that the first form of his answer was necessarily abandoned as no longer applicable to the circumstances, and another had to be sought. Only one was possible. If America was to serve all nations she must make war on the Power which was striving to make all nations serve itself. Thus, by what I again venture to call dramatic necessity, we are carried stage by stage from the moment when the President declared 'there is such a thing as a man being too proud to fight' to the last sentence of his speech the other day: 'There is therefore but one response possible from us: force, force to the utmost, force without stint or limit, the righteous and triumphant force which shall make right the law of the world, and cast every selfish dominion down into the dust.' Thus was Wilson the peacemaker turned into Wilson the warmaker. The 'divinity that shapes our ends' is clearly accountable for the transition, and the world may rejoice that it found in the President an instrument amenable to its guidance. He stands out to-day as the foremost interpreter of the international mind.

The authors of the admirable book to which I have referred have done well to interweave with their narrative the almost synchronous story of the President's dealings with Mexico, for the two things throw light upon one another. If a guarantee were needed for the entire sincerity of Mr. Wilson's professions it could be found in the record of the Mexican transactions. These had given rise to the notion among his European critics, and also, I think, among not a few of his fellow countrymen, that he was an impracticable idealist. We now know that his Mexican policy and his European policy were intimately related. They sprang from the same root, and had the same guiding idea. Judged by the standards which most conquering Powers have applied to their actions, Mr. Wilson would have been fully justified in making war upon Mexico for the purpose of restoring order, if for nothing else. There were many Liberal statesmen in other countries who found his attitude hard to understand, and in some instances openly condemned it, and there is little doubt that he would have raised his general reputation as a statesman—at least, for a time—if he had pursued a 'stronger' policy. We now know, however, and by the clearest of evidence, that the 'impracticable idealism' which kept him out of war with Mexico was identically the same with that which later on brought him into war with Germany. As in the later so in

the earlier problem, the question Mr. Wilson set himself to answer was how can the American Republic help—how can it best serve the interests of the rich but disordered and miserable country which fate has assigned as its neighbor?

There were abundant precedents for intervention to which Mr. Wilson might have appealed without the slightest fear that his credit would suffer. He came to the conclusion, however, that the best service the United States could render to Mexico was to respect her integrity and independence, and leave her to work out her own salvation. To the argument that Mexico was incapable of doing this, and that neither her integrity nor her independence was worthy of respect he consistently turned a deaf ear; nor was he much more attentive to the various commercial interests that were involved.

As one reads the story in the light of later events, one is tempted to believe that some kindly genius was warning the President of the situation he would shortly have to face. For, if he had acted on the lines demanded by his critics, he would not only have tied up a considerable part of the national resources at a time when they were all wanted for a far graver enterprise, but he would have seemed to be acting on the accursed principle which underlies the creed of Germany, and so deprived the Allies of the enormous moral force which the entry of America into the war has conferred on the common cause. Had Mexico been within striking distance of German aggression there is not a doubt she would have been conquered, exploited, and enslaved. We well regret that Mexico is still in the condition of chaos, and may possibly remain so for some time to come. But this is as nothing compared with the fact that President Wilson has clean hands.

I cannot refrain from thinking, however, that the President's experience with Mexico may be in some measure accountable for what I will venture to call a certain limitation of vision in his view of 'the smaller and weaker nations'—a limitation he shares with many who have less excuse for displaying it. In his public utterances, especially in those which refer to the League of Peace, he constantly tends to speak of these small nations as though they were satisfied with their present smallness and nurtured no designs of expansion at the expense of their neighbors—a description which is true of some of them and possibly of Mexico and of other Latin-American states with which the President has been brought into more immediate contact. Whether or no I am right in assigning this as the cause—and perhaps I am totally wrong—there can be no doubt that Mr. Wilson's habit of mind inclines him to think of small states as needing rather protection than restraint.

Again and again we find him referring to the right of small states to develop their own life in their own way, and to the duty of great states to protect them in this right. Unfortunately, however, there are some small states whose outstanding characteristic is the desire to become big ones at the expense of their neighbors, and whose notion of living their own life in their own way takes precisely that form.

Small states of this character—and there are several of them—are among the chief troublers of the peace of the world; and it would be difficult for Powers which were once small ones themselves, and have grown great by conquest, to make a rule forbidding the present small Powers from following their own example; and the first attempts to enforce such a rule would certainly lead to some embarrassing reminders, and perhaps to some bitter taunts. But here again the history of the United States has been very different from that of the other great Powers. She would be immune—or almost immune—from the taunts to which the others would be exposed. And this perhaps may also account, in part, for the fact that Mr. Wilson shows a tendency to overlook the difficulty. No doubt the difficulty would be largely overcome if it were the lot of the United States to exercise a dominating influence in the League of Nations. And this we may very well believe to be her destiny. 'America,' asserted President Wilson, in May, 1915, 'was created to unite mankind.'

That the rights of great nations are entitled to respect only when they are translated into corresponding duties to mankind is a principle which the guiding minds of the British Empire are prepared to accept. Our people have long been familiar with 'the White Man's Burden,' and all that Mr. Wilson has said about America as the uniter of nations is, if I mistake not, only a wider application of the principle which underlies that phrase. He speaks a language we understand, and he will find us ready to join hands with him, and with his countrymen, in united effort to realize his great ideal of international service. It is not enough that an alliance should exist between America and Great Britain. It is essential that it should be guided by a clear and lofty principle of action. This principle Mr. Wilson has supplied, and he has stated it in a form which expresses the best elements of our own political aspirations. The effect has been not only to increase our confidence in the outcome of the war, and to give us a new assurance that we stand upon the rock, but to open out a great prospect of future service to humanity in which America and Great Britain will be joined band to hand. Only when nations are united on the highest ground can we say that they are united at all. It is to the highest ground that Mr. Wilson has raised our alliance, and so long as we stand there together this alliance will remain indissoluble.

I have spoken of President Wilson's mind as having evolved its present character. It is a war mind evolved from a peace mind, the most dangerous sort of mind for an enemy to encounter. But we should make a mistake if we were to assume that Mr. Wilson's evolution will be arrested at its present stage. It will unquestionably go on to further developments. What precisely these will be it is, of course, impossible to say; but we may be sure that they will follow the general course of his evolution up to date. This has taken the form of making clear and explicit in his later policy what was hidden and implicit in his earlier policy.

In forecasting the line of his future influence we should do well, there-



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